

A N O V E R V I E W O F T H E

Salary & Benefit SURVEY



Updated September 2024

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Introduction to the Salary and Benefit Survey

Salary and Benefit Survey basics

The Salary and Benefit Survey (SBS) is a longstanding annual survey conducted by the Association of Washington Cities (AWC) in partnership with the Washington State Association of Counties (WSAC). The SBS is a valuable service that provides city, town, and county management with a comprehensive set of comparable data to assist in determining appropriate wages and benefits for employees. The survey is voluntary, but historically has a high participation rate from cities, towns, and counties (usually in the 80-90% range) because of how valuable the survey data is to local governments.

The SBS equips local governments with essential data to inform decisions on budgeting, collective bargaining, and competitive compensation.

SBS is a comprehensive look at salary and benefits for jobs at cities and counties. Key information reported in the SBS includes city and county employee compensation and benefits, like insurance plans, job types, and information about the specific positions at the city or county. In addition, the survey includes basic profile information on cities and counties, like population, number of employees, and information on the city or county tax base allowing for comparisons across jurisdictions.

The survey is typically conducted between March and May each year and results are published by mid-July to be available for use during contract negotiations and budget writing in the fall.

With the new SBS reporting dashboard, users can better develop “comparables” to understand the local market rate for a particular job’s salary and benefits while taking into account factors like population, tax base, or region. The SBS reporting tool is also increasingly a repository for copies of city and county collective bargaining agreements (CBAs) and job descriptions for SBS users to view.

Some of the main uses of SBS data include:

- **Budget writing:** Use by budget writers for determining budgets for personnel salaries and benefits. Salaries and benefits are often some of the largest and fastest growing expenses for a city or county.
- **Collective bargaining:** Use by labor negotiators for finding relevant and defensible comparables to use in collective bargaining agreement negotiations with unions.
- **Setting compensation:** Helping cities and counties form competitive compensation packages to recruit and retain municipal employees.
- **Historical data:** Providing a data source to track and report changes in employee compensation over time. For example, AWC used SBS data in producing the [2024 State of the Cities: Municipal workforce—The foundation of city services](https://wacities.org/data-resources/articles/2024/04/11/state-of-the-cities-municipal-workforce-the-foundation-of-city-services) report.*



Scan here or go to wacities.org/sbs to access the SBS and more resources!

The survey data and the reporting dashboard are available at no cost to AWC member cities and towns, WSAC member counties, and public sector AWC associate members. Access is limited to those representing management of their respective organizations.

AWC has been conducting the Salary and Benefit Survey since the early 1950s. Once a paper report, it is now an interactive dashboard providing data with a few easy clicks. There are no plans to expand the AWC Salary and Benefit Survey beyond Washington’s 320 cities and counties.

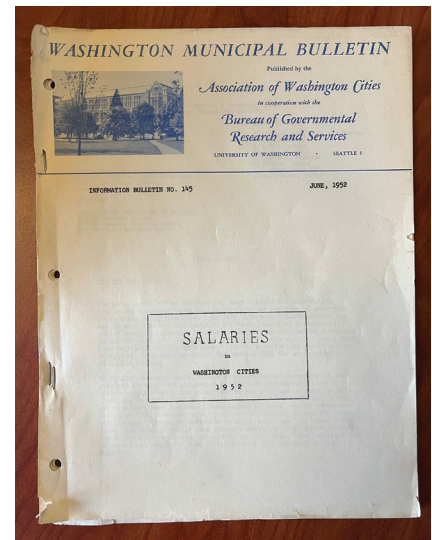
*<https://wacities.org/data-resources/articles/2024/04/11/state-of-the-cities-municipal-workforce-the-foundation-of-city-services>

2 Evolution of the Salary and Benefit Survey

The Salary and Benefit Survey has evolved over its decades-long history. One of the first salary surveys was published in 1952 by AWC in partnership with the Municipal Research and Services Center (then called the Bureau of Governmental Research and Services). That survey was conducted at the request of cities that wanted comparables available for budget writing purposes. The original 1952 survey was sent out to all the cities and towns in Washington at the time and received 180 responses. Since the mid-1970s, AWC has partnered with WSAC to include both city and county data in the SBS.

Through 2019, the SBS was published as a printed booklet that listed tables of salary and benefit data submitted by cities. Booklets were sent through the mail to each member city. In more recent years, SBS data was also available as a digital spreadsheet in addition to a printed book.

In 2020, AWC moved to a fully electronic platform for both taking and publishing the SBS, using an online reporting dashboard.



The original 1952 AWC Salary Survey.

Evolution of salaries

A look at selected SBS data going back to 1952 provides a snapshot of employee salary changes over time. The following table contains a few sample cities and job descriptions to highlight those changes. Not every city submitted data for every position in a given year, indicated by a “-.” Salaries are annual and have not been adjusted for inflation. Where a range was given, the maximum salary was used.

City	Position	1952	1964	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010	2020
Seattle	City Clerk	\$8,400	\$14,004	-	\$47,604	\$65,496	\$70,344	\$200,712	\$253,668
	Police Officer	\$3,900	\$6,840	\$10,560	\$22,152	\$37,320	\$53,460	\$83,892	\$109,512
	Sr. Engineer	\$6,600	\$10,596	\$13,920	\$28,104	-	\$67,740	\$100,032	\$131,664
Yakima	City Clerk	\$4,095	\$6,780	\$10,488	\$22,524	\$41,076	\$59,904	\$78,336	\$100,080
	Police Officer	\$3,580	\$5,820	\$8,580	\$19,824	\$34,968	\$52,080	\$73,056	\$86,148
	Sr. Engineer	\$5,166	\$7,500	\$10,488	\$23,400	\$34,512	\$50,064	\$90,708	\$97,092
Olympia	City Clerk	\$3,240	-	-	\$29,148	-	-	-	\$101,100
	Police Officer	\$3,300	\$5,796	\$9,204	\$21,970	\$34,908	\$52,704	-	-
	Sr. Engineer	\$6,600	\$7,860	\$11,004	\$27,816	\$40,380	\$60,084	-	\$110,040
Pullman	City Clerk	\$2,700	\$5,940	\$8,148	-	\$45,384	-	-	\$63,492
	Police Officer	\$3,240	\$5,520	\$8,172	\$16,200	-	\$52,212	\$70,308	\$92,424
	Sr. Engineer	\$4,920	-	\$10,140	\$23,736	\$38,184	-	-	\$81,156
Whitman Co.	County Clerk		N/A		\$18,144	\$27,504	\$40,560	\$57,288	\$78,108
	Sheriff Deputy		N/A		\$12,660	\$23,172	\$37,656	\$50,616	\$66,384
	Sr. Engineer		N/A		\$24,900	\$39,060	\$40,356	-	-

Note: Survey data from 2020 on is available on the SBS reporting dashboard. Survey data from 2008-2019 is available on digital spreadsheets and can be provided on request. Survey data prior to 2008 is only available in printed forms.

3 The SBS reporting dashboard

Transitioning from paper to online

In 2020, the SBS transitioned from a paper booklet and Excel spreadsheet into a fully online report. The SBS online reporting dashboard allows users to view current year data as well as historical data from 2020 forward.

The SBS online reporting tool allows users to easily slice and dice the data into sets customized to meet the user's needs. One of the key features of the dashboard is the ability to filter results, giving users a dialed-in look at their desired comparables. With the online reporting dashboard, users can filter by organization, population, tax base, geography, position, salary range, vacation hours, job descriptions, and more. Some entries include useful resource documents, such as copies of collective bargaining agreements (CBAs).

This functionality makes the SBS far more useful and versatile than it was with static spreadsheets and printouts, increasing the data's value to members.

With a few clicks, the reporting dashboard allows users to quickly:

- Choose individual jurisdictions to compare
- Compare your city only to jurisdictions with similar population or tax base
- Select individual positions you want to see results for, such as "police officer" and "deputy sheriff"
- Select "focus questions," or specific data points that you want to see, like minimum and maximum salary, hours per week, salary type, contract dates, or insurance plan information
- Limit results to particular geographic areas

For members of the AWC Employee Benefit Trust, AWC automatically uploads the relevant benefits information into the survey.



Scan to view step by step instructional videos*

Use this guide to learn the basics of entering data into the SBS, as well as how to use the online reporting dashboard to get your desired results.

Taking the survey

The value of SBS reporting lies in the comprehensive data gathered from numerous jurisdictions. AWC deeply appreciates the dedication and hard work of city and county staff who complete the SBS each year. We recognize it is a significant task, but given that many cities and counties utilize the SBS at various times, this effort is truly worthwhile.

When it comes time for a city or county to take the survey, authorized SBS users log in through the SBS webpage with a valid AWC user ID. To add authorized SBS users, contact research@awcnet.org.

Once the survey is open, survey takers complete four sections of the survey. AWC recommends completing the survey sections in order, since later sections are tailored to each organization based on information provided in previous sections.

AWC automatically pre-loads some basic demographic data about each city, including city population. A city or county's previous year answers are also available to reference for survey takers.

*<https://wacities.org/data-resources/hr-labor-relations/sbs-videos>

A view of the SBS section summary. Survey takers can review their organization's information and toggle between submitted sections of the survey using the icons in the column on the left, and use the tabs on the upper right to access the fields where they can enter their organization's data.

The sections, and information needed to complete them, are:

1. **Organization and services profile.** High level info on your city or county and selecting service categories, which determine positions you'll be asked about later in the survey.
2. **Insurance benefits.** Details on medical, dental, and vision plans offered to your organization's employees.
3. **Position groups.** The position and employee groups (i.e. eligible for similar benefits) in your organization. Most organizations have entries for non-represented employees, elected officials, and each bargaining unit. This includes cost sharing data for benefits for each group and is also where CBAs can be uploaded to the survey.
4. **Position information.** Information on salaries for the various positions included in your organization based on the service categories you selected in the organization and services profile section. This is also where job descriptions can be uploaded to the survey.

After completing each page in a section, survey takers are required to check the box at the bottom of the survey page that marks the page as complete and click "Review and submit." The SBS will then bring users to a summary page where they can double check their work and then click "Submit section." To edit a previously submitted section, use the tabs in the upper right corner to return to the section that needs editing and resubmit. Once all sections of the survey are submitted, the survey is now complete! If further changes are needed, contact AWC at research@awcnet.org.

Using the reporting dashboard

Cities and counties regularly give us feedback on how useful the reporting dashboard is for their work. The online reporting dashboard provides a variety of ways to sort SBS data to meet the needs of cities and counties. The features that make the reporting dashboard so useful include the ability to filter results by organization, position, “focused questions,” or a combination of filters. The reporting dashboard also allows users to easily view a growing library of CBAs and job descriptions.

The screenshot shows the Reporting Dashboard interface. On the left, the 'Define report filters' panel includes a 'Report name' field (My Report), a 'Survey term' dropdown (2024 Salary and Benefit), and filter buttons for 'Organizations (0)', 'Positions (0)', and 'Questions (0)'. At the bottom of this panel are 'Load saved reports', 'Save', 'Save as copy', 'Help', 'Clear', and 'Run report' buttons. On the right, the 'Survey sections' area displays four icons: 'Organization and services profile', 'Insurance benefits', 'Position groups', and 'Position information'. Below this is the 'Organization report results' section, which contains a video player titled 'Using the reporting tool'. The video player includes a transcript with the following steps:

1. Upon logging into the system, click **Reporting Dashboard** in upper left-hand side of your screen within the blue header. This will open the Reporting dashboard shown below where you can begin to run reports.
2. To view the complete survey results without customizations, click the blue **Run report** button. Once the report loads, you can export the salary survey data in its entirety by clicking the yellow **Export XLSX** button on the right-hand side of your screen.
3. By default, the **Organization and Services profile** will load first. You can navigate through different sections by clicking each of the **Survey sections** icons.
4. In each section you can sort by any column, adjust page sizes, and export a CSV of that section by clicking the yellow **CSV** button.

A view of the Reporting Dashboard landing page. Filters and Survey Section tabs indicated by red arrows.

From the reporting dashboard, the data filtering functions appear on the left-hand side. Choose a reporting year, select desired filters, and click “run report.”

Filtering by organization lets users either select organizations by:

- Specific jurisdictions, or jurisdiction type
- All jurisdictions within a county or set of counties
- Organization characteristics, like population or tax base assessed value, assessed value per capita, regular levy amount, and sales tax revenue

Filtering by position allows users to filter data for positions within an entire service category (e.g. “city law enforcement” which includes police officers, chiefs, detectives, dispatchers, etc.) or by specific positions. The position filter allows users the option to choose from among only those positions that are on their city or county’s salary survey.

If you are looking for specific data points about a position (e.g. “maximum salary” or “vacation days,”) filtering by “focus questions” may be the way to go. Here, users can select a group of data points from any one of the four sections of the SBS, and further refine those through additional criteria. This filter can also be used to select for data entries that have attachments, like uploaded CBAs or local job descriptions.

After a user has run a report and is looking at their customized dataset, they navigate to specific sections of the survey using the “Survey sections” tabs in the upper center of the reporting dashboard. If focused questions were used to filter the search results, an extra tab will appear labeled “focused questions” where a dataset with columns for specific focused questions will appear. Users can also download the entire report or a specific section of the report to an Excel spreadsheet.

The filtering functions of the SBS allow cities and counties to quickly and easily develop comparables or otherwise customize SBS data to meet their needs. It is a far cry from the days of flipping through a printed SBS booklet!

4 Conclusion

The SBS is a longstanding, versatile tool for cities and counties to use in determining salaries and benefits for employees. Year after year, we are thankful for the participation from local governments in filling out the survey and contributing to this great resource for members. We know that it is often a heavy lift for many cities and counties to make an SBS submission, and we appreciate the effort that members make year in and year out to keep the SBS up-to-date and useful. AWC is always looking for ways to make it easier to fill out the SBS survey and improve the functionality of the SBS reporting dashboard. If you have suggestions or questions, please reach out to us at research@awcnet.org.



*<https://wacities.org/news/2024/09/05/2024-salary-and-benefit-survey-highlights>



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